

3

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# Sandinistas use Christian visitors as propaganda tool, defector says

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The Sandinista government in Nicaragua covers up human-rights violations through an intensive disinformation effort aimed at visiting liberal religious delegations, a high-level Nicaraguan defector says.

"Religious people are now being used as just one more element in the Sandinista front's international political propaganda effort, whereby they maintain a democratic image and pretend to respect religion while they finish consolidating their power," said Alvaro Baldizon Aviles, 26, who was chief investigator of internal abuses within the Interior Ministry until he fled to Honduras in July and defected to the United States.

When the Nicaraguan government began receiving heavy international pressure to end human-rights abuses, Mr. Baldizon said Interior Minister Tomas Borge assigned him to investigate the various cases so that an appropriate cover story could be concocted.

Many of these cases involved the torture and murder of Catholic peasants and the harassment and torture of their parish priests, he said in an interview last week.

"In July 1983, in the village of San Miguelito, a couple, Guillermo Lorio and Jamilet Sequeira, who were members of a Catholic organization called Delegates of the Word, were apprehended by three officers of the Interior Ministry — two state security officers, named Moises and Guillermo Lugo Marengo, and 1st Lt. Victor Romero, [a regional] chief of special troops," Mr. Baldizon said.

The two Catholics were interrogated, tortured and their throats were slit, Mr. Baldizon said. Returning to the bodies at dawn with a shovel to bury them, the officers found Miss Sequeira still alive, kneeling in prayer with a crucifix.

"Guillermo Lugo Marango cut her throat again and shot her..." he said.

Only when a Dutch human-rights commission asked the Nicaraguan government about this case did a trial take place, he said. The three

murderers were found guilty and sentenced to 30 years in prison. But after the Dutch commission left the country, the killers were released and returned to military duty, Mr. Baldizon said.

"This is not an isolated case," he added.

"Similar incidents have occurred many times before with the prior knowledge of delegates from the Interior Ministry... especially in the mountains. In the Pacific area where the cities are located, the Sandinistas have been more careful to do 'better planning' — kidnapping mainly in sparsely populated areas where there are no witnesses," Mr. Baldizon said.

Tomas Borge, usually in charge of meeting with religious and foreign political youth delegations, tries to "use and manipulate the sound sentiments and good intentions of religious people," Mr. Baldizon said.

U.S. delegations usually come from liberal Protestant denominations such as the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodists, Episcopalians and liberal Catholic religious orders such as the Maryknolls and Dominicans, said Maria Thomas of the Institute of Religion and Democracy, a Washington-based organization that monitors the actions and finances of liberal Protestant denominations.

"To carry out the charade, Borge

has two different offices," Mr. Baldizon said. "One office is located in the Siglo Mayor building, where he meets with religious delegations and delegations from democratic political parties. In this office Borge has photographs of children, gilded carved crucifixes and a Bible or two.

"However, Borge's real office, where he fulfills his duties as Interior Minister, is located in the housing complex where he lives in Bello Horizon. In that office there are no crucifixes or Bibles — only Marxist literature and posters of Marx, Engels and Lenin."

Another example of Sandinista disinformation involves state security police masquerading as evangelicals, he said.

In June, for example, an international assembly of 200 Baptist youths met in Managua. In the closing session at which Mr. Borge spoke, "500 people from the Interior Ministry, including myself, were instructed to dress as civilians, to pretend that we were evangelicals and to participate in the closing ceremonies," Mr. Baldizon said.

A State Department official said the Sandinistas have people sympathetic to the government in key positions in organizations such as the Committee for Development Aid, a Protestant relief agency founded in the wake of the devastating 1972 earthquake in Nicaragua.

CEPAD receives most of its U.S. funding from the National Council of Churches and is headed by Mr. Sixto Ulloa, a Sandinista delegate to the National Assembly who, Mr. Baldizon said, "is under the direction of state security."